

# Declarations of ‘Self-Reliance’: Alternative Visions of Dependency, Citizenship and Development in Vanuatu

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## ABSTRACT

*This article discusses how dependency’s antonym, ‘self-reliance’ expresses and shapes aspirations for development, and ideas about citizenship in Vanuatu. This ‘keyword’ was popularized in the process of decolonization and nation-building in Vanuatu, and influenced by Dependency Theory, Pan-Africanism, Black Internationalism, and trans-Pacific visions of decolonization and development. But vernacular ideas of ‘self-reliance’ also articulate different aspirations for development at ‘grassroots’ community level, as will be shown in two case studies. The first is a community with a high degree of engagement in New Zealand’s seasonal worker programme. The second is around the cultivation of kava — a plant with relaxant and soporific properties — for burgeoning domestic and export markets.*

Keywords: Vanuatu, dependency theory, decolonization, self-reliance, development.

## INTRODUCTION: DEPENDENCY AND SELF-RELIANCE AS KEYWORDS

Pacific scholar Epeli Hau’ofa’s (1994) essay ‘Our Sea of Islands’ is a widely circulated and influential call for a reconceptualization of the Pacific as fundamentally interconnected and dynamic. It represents an explicit rejoinder to the diagnosis, in development and migration discourse, of the small island nations as weak, and hopelessly dependent. Hau’ofa (1994:151) initially shared aspects of this pessimism, having internalised and propagated the implications of Dependency Theory. But he became persuaded, in conversation with Marshall Sahlins to overcome this ‘despondency theory’ (Sahlins 2000), and present a more positive vision, based on transnational relations and cultural practices (see Clifford 2009:243; Tomlinson 2019:30; Martin this volume). Likewise, I will argue, ni-Vanuatu have refused to accept dependency as a bleak inevitability. Dreams of ‘self-reliance’, drawing on transnational (Pan-African as well as Pan-Pacific) ideas as well as indigenous cultural resources, have animated the postcolonial project and alternative visions of development.

Dependency’s antonyms, ‘independence’ (Bislama: *independens*), and especially ‘self-reliance’ (*self rilaens*) have become political keywords in Vanuatu, taken up at different scales to express desires and aspirations for the nation, particularly over what should constitute citizenship, and development. Following Williams (1976), ‘keywords’ can be

understood as terms and concepts that play an active role in expressing and shaping social and political life. 'Keywords' are defined by Williams (1976:24) as 'an exploration of the vocabulary of a crucial area of social and cultural discussion, which has been inherited within precise historical and social conditions'. Keywords carry ambiguous, shifting, and often contradictory meanings, and are only graspable in the context of their economic, political and social history. But in their deployment in ongoing arguments and struggles over values, needs and aspirations, keywords also play a part in how people make their own histories (Fraser and Gordon 1994a:310).

The term 'dependency' contains an ambiguity that allows it to express different ideologies around personhood and society, redistributive politics and citizenship. Fraser and Gordon (1994a, 1994b) provided a critical genealogy of 'dependency' as a 'keyword', to uncover its shifting ideological role in the anglophone West, and the hidden assumptions underpinning it. Fraser and Gordon (1994b:312–3) showed how the 'dependence' long demarcated people's subordinate status as political subjects, rather than citizens.

From 1906 until Independence in 1980, the indigenous people of Vanuatu, then the Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides, were effectively stateless: denied citizenship, civil status, and nationality (Rawlings 2015). This article will trace the particular genealogy of the keyword 'dependence', and its antonyms 'independence' and 'self-reliance' in the context of its history of decolonization and nation-making in Vanuatu. It then examines how the term '*self rilans*' has been vernacularized by 'grassroots' villagers in rural Vanuatu to express localized conceptions of citizenship (taken in the broad sense of relations between people and the state) and of economic development.

First, I discuss how the keywords 'dependency' and 'self-reliance' have been brought into play in different contexts to debate economic policy, and political rights. I describe how 'independence' and '(inter)dependence' have been used to distinguish different modes of personhood and exchange. I then discuss how the prevailing figure of the 'possessive individual' in liberal Western political and economic theory has attached to a conception of rights-bearing citizens that does not adequately reflect historical experience and present-day practice in Vanuatu.

The term 'self-reliance' was popularized in Vanuatu in the 1970s and 1980s in the process of decolonization and nation-forming and in opposition to dominant development paradigms. While modernisation theories blamed 'underdevelopment' on tradition, 'Dependency' theories that emerged in the 1970s highlighted exploitation of the 'periphery' by the 'core'. In the second section, I discuss the influence of African liberation (particularly Nyerere's Tanzania), Black internationalist, and Third-Worldist movements, as well as Pan-Pacific movements, and the revalorisation of *kastom* (Bislama from 'custom'; traditional or indigenous knowledges and practices), on decolonisation struggles in Vanuatu. Such conversations recentred the periphery and grounded visions for 'alternative developments' based on economic 'self-reliance' (Amin 1990).

'Self-reliance' remains an important political keyword, particularly for expressing different visions of economic development. Often, people use the term to discuss the direction of the nation; whether disappointment that the promised national 'economic self-reliance' has not materialized, or the reassertion of national self-reliance as a development goal. In the third section, I describe how some Ni-Vanuatu politicians evoke *kastom* as the basis for national identity and economic security, countering neoliberal development discourse that echoes the 'modernization' paradigms of the mid 20th century.

In the final two sections, I present two case studies to show how the keywords 'dependence' and 'self-reliance' has been taken up by rural 'grassroots' to delimit obligations and claims, and express their desires and concerns.<sup>1</sup> I draw on two research projects in Vanuatu to discuss different vernacular ideas of 'dependence' and 'self-reliance' as they

operate at local level. The first is my doctoral research in a community with a high degree of engagement in an overseas temporary migration program. The second stems from recent (2019) research on the expansion of the production and export of kava (*piper methysticum*), a soporific plant preparation, for the domestic and burgeoning export market. I reflect on what these vernacular ideas of 'self-reliance' reveal of Ni-Vanuatu hopes for development and ideals of citizenship.

## DEPENDENCY AND SELF-RELIANCE

### Possessive individuals in the Pacific?

In preindustrial Europe, 'dependence' evoked a family of associations, referring to anyone who had to make a living by working for others, and those in foreign colonies and possessions (Fraser and Gordon 1994a, 1994b). Macpherson (1962:263–4; see also Martin and Yanagisako 2020) described the rise of 'possessive individualism' in 17th century Europe, based on the assumption of the individual as self-proprietor, free to choose to enter into exchange relationships with others. At that time, ascriptions of 'independence' were still limited to those (white, male) property owners, who could live without labouring. With industrialization in the 18th and 19th centuries, the grounds of independence were extended to include wage labourers (Halvorsen 1998:58; Martin and Yanagisako 2020). But well into 20th century, the dignity of 'independence' extended to European wage workers was still denied to colonized subjects labouring in 'dependencies' (Fraser and Gordon 1994a:317; see also Fraser and Gordon 1994b:27 n.10; Halvorsen 1998:58). Agitations for political rights were often based on counter-conceptions of freedom and independence.

Anthropologists have often drawn comparisons between the liberal Western conception of the person as self-proprietor, in a society as composed of exchanges between reciprocally independent individuals, and prevailing ideas of personhood and society elsewhere. For Dumont (1970:37), the ideal of the (possessive) individual as rights-bearing subject, and self-interested *homo economicus* was the defining feature of modern Western ideology. Strathern's (1988) *Gender of the Gift* opposed Western individualism based on authorship of one's acts, and Melanesian 'dividual' personhood (see Martin this volume). More recently, Ferguson (2013:226) suggested that, unlike Western liberalism, African ideas of personhood may valorise dependence as a form of agency.

While these analyses usefully unsettled Eurocentric liberal assumptions, ethnography affirms that individualistic or 'possessive' modes of personhood and social relations coexist everywhere with relational 'dividual' or 'distributive' forms (LiPuma 1998:56; Morgain and Taylor 2015:5). Anthropologists of Melanesia have pointed to how ideologies of self-proprietorship have gained strength through the generalization of market exchange, development discourse, liberal democracy, incipient class formation, Christianity, and other social transformations (Foster 1997:19; Martin 2007; Robbins 2007; Sykes 2007; Syndicus this volume). Diverging ideals of independence and (inter)dependence offer the terms for interpersonal contestations and conflicts over the constitution of the subject and their obligations to others.

But while such tensions, borne out in critiques of 'handouts' and counter-accusations of selfish behaviour are prevalent in Vanuatu, when it comes to the use of the keyword 'self-reliance', it only rarely connotes an individualistic 'proprietor of the self, owing nothing to society' (Macpherson 1962:3). Rather, when evoked by Ni-Vanuatu, 'self-reliance' tends to be discussed in terms of obligations and collective responsibility in contributing to development at local, as well as national scales.

### Citizenship and the subject of 'custom'

The figure of the 'possessive individual' as the protagonist in economic exchange is also foregrounded in the prevailing notion of the civil citizen in political philosophy as the individual freely entering into a social contract with the state as guarantor of his rights to property, exchange, and personal liberties, or 'civil rights' (Foster 1997:18–9; Fraser and Gordon 1992:52; Lazar 2012:342). For sociologist Marshall (1950), this civil citizenship (legal rights), would gradually be extended to political citizenship (towards universal suffrage), and finally 'social citizenship' through the extension of the welfare state.

However, as Fraser and Gordon suggest, the archetypal citizen represented in the figure of the rights-bearing 'independent' man may elide forms of dependency which undergird his status. They argue the rise of civil citizenship eroded a moral economy of 'communal responsibility', as property rights displaced kinship and customary obligations and claims. Political citizenship was demarcated through an interplay of independence and dependence, but transfers were figured as either contract exchange or unilateral charity, displacing other forms of mutual obligation and claims (Fraser and Gordon 1992:56–7). Likewise, the individualism foregrounded in prevailing Western political concepts may present particular problems for Melanesians, suggests LiPuma (1998:63) because they have tended to put more weight on 'dividual' aspects of personhood and relations.

The term 'self-reliance', as opposed to dependence, seems to have been popularized with the peaking of liberalism and individualist ethics in America and Europe in the mid-late 19th century. Predictably, the interplay of 'dependency' and 'self-reliance' as political keywords was revived in 1970s and 1980s UK, USA and Europe to articulate neoliberal thought and policy, in which dependency is also often pathologized (Ferguson 2013; Fraser and Gordon 1994a; Halvorsen 1998). Margaret Thatcher sought to revive Victorian values, including self-reliance, property ownership and thrift, as 'all part of the spiritual ballast which maintains responsible citizenship' (Samuel 1992:11–2). Reagan's administration declared that welfare had 'been rewarding dependency instead of self-reliance' (NYT 1981). Indeed, Fraser and Gordon (1992:46) suggest 'social citizenship' has never been realised in USA, where welfare has been treated as pathological dependence. But, more recently, there has been widespread renewed interest in alternative conceptions of 'social citizenship' (reconceptualizing citizenship as not dependent on wage work), and calls for universal entitlements to guaranteed basic income (Chamberlain 2018; Ferguson 2015; Graeber 2019).

Political citizenship was a hard-won battle in Vanuatu. The Anglo-French Condominium effectively operated as a two-tier society of citizen-settlers *vs* stateless natives, to an unusual degree, as Rawlings has detailed. Indigenous Ni-Vanuatu (then New Hebrideans) were not only denied all citizen and civil status, but prevented from owning land and property in fully legal terms. They were also deprived of passports and a wide range of other rights and freedoms. Moreover, the archipelago was administered also in terms of an asymmetrical 'geoclassification' between civil and common, *versus* customary law, in which customary law was subordinate (Rawlings 2015). This broadly fits Mamdani's (1996:19) description of the 'double sided' late colonial state in which rights-bearing citizens governed colonial subjects (who were denied citizenship) *via* indirect rule and enforced 'custom'. Mamdani (1996:22) suggests 'custom' was to some extent an invented technique of the colonizers, though it was always a site of struggle.

In Vanuatu, *kastom* (indigenous knowledges and practices), denigrated in the colonial period, was redefined as a political symbol in the struggle for Independence, to counter statelessness and land alienation: the two main issues inciting anti-colonial struggle (Rawlings 2015). *Kastom* was doubly significant in grounding anticolonial struggles in the region. It both recalled the symbolism of earlier localized forms of resistance against

colonial impositions across Melanesia, and in its appeal to already-existing values and practices echoed the political symbolism deployed in nation-making elsewhere, such as Nkrumah's Ghana, and Nyerere's Tanzania (Keesing 1982:297).

Political participation is remarkably high across Vanuatu, where many people actively involve themselves in political parties, and local systems of government. But, if 'social citizenship' for Marshall (1950:53) defines 'the right to share in full in the social heritage and live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in society', then it takes a substantively different form for most Ni-Vanuatu than in Europe and USA. In Vanuatu, the majority of the population live in rural areas and are not predominantly wage labourers. Moreover, as a tax haven, there is a limited tax base as a source for welfare distribution. Provisioning for most depends to a large extent on customary rights to land and resources, and obligation and claims-making draws substantially on place-based kinship and community relations.

Possessive individualism and nationalism are not incompatible, rather they may mutually entail one another: a double relation of possession between citizen and nation. The nation has been described as a 'collective individual' possessing a self-consciousness, national culture, territory, and shared traits and attributes (Dumont 1970:33; Foster 1997:18–9; Handler 1988:51, 153, 253). Nation-making requires producing 'peoplehood' as well as personhood, while rendering culture as something possessed (Foster 1997:20; Robbins 2007). *Kastom* as symbol for the new nation was interpreted by many anthropologists in 1980s and 1990s as a kind of (inauthentic) 'invented tradition' (see Rawlings 2015:159). However, I argue that *kastom* and 'self-reliance' continue to operate as effective political 'keywords'<sup>2</sup> in Vanuatu, expressing 'substantive meanings of what it is to be a citizen' (Rawlings 2015:160) and alternative visions of development.

## ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENTS: DEPENDENCY AND SELF-RELIANCE

### Decolonising dependency

At the same time as 'dependency' and 'self-reliance' were being deployed in arguments over welfare in Euro-America in the 1970s and 1980s, they were also terms of debate over the causes and solutions to problems of 'underdevelopment' in the 'Third World'. Up until the late 1960s, 'Modernisation Theory' had been the dominant Western development paradigm. Its chief proponent Rostow (1960) characterised tradition as antithetical to development. The modernisation thesis was based on the assumption that – with measures to stimulate economic 'take off' – all countries could follow the path to development of the modern industrial countries. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, Rostow suggested transitional societies that insufficiently organised themselves could fall victim to communism (Rist 2002:94–6).

In 1970s 'Dependency Theory', was formulated by New Left and postcolonial scholars such as Raul Prebisch and Andre Gunder Frank in opposition to the Modernisation paradigm. The theory evoked histories of asymmetrical neo-colonial power and exchange relationships within the capitalist world system as the root causes of 'underdevelopment' in the periphery, and growth in the core (Rist 2002; compare Hoëm this volume; Syndicus this volume). Underdeveloped countries needed to break away from dependency relations with capitalist centres through some combination of socialism and 'self-reliance' (Lea 2000:108). Dependency Theory sought to rid the notion of 'dependency' from its moral connotations and its individualism, emphasising political economic and social conditions of subjection and subordination (Fraser and Gordon 1994a:330–1). The Dependency approach was a

major influence on the prevailing form of Third Worldism in the 1970s, which has been called the ‘practical complement’ to Dependency Theory, in its approach to economic development (Berger 2004:21; also Rist 2002:130).

To understand how ‘self-reliance’ became so important in Vanuatu, it is necessary to trace how the keyword travelled *via* Africa, particularly Tanzania, where self-reliance was propagated by the first president, Julius Nyerere to address dependency, which he saw as the greatest impediment to sovereignty<sup>3</sup> (Dinkel 2018:137). In mid-1960s, Dar Es Salaam was a hotbed for southern African liberation movements, where African scholars were joined by US Black Panthers, and Marxian and New Left proponents of Dependency Theory, including Andre Gunder Frank, Walter Rodney, Immanuel Wallerstein (who developed World Systems Theory), Giovanni Arrighi, and Samir Amin (Arrighi 2009; Sharp et al. 2019). In 1967, Nyerere’s Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) party’s ‘Arusha Declaration and TANU’s Policy on Socialism and Self-Reliance’ foregrounded ‘self-reliance’ (*kujitegemea*) and ‘autocentred development’ (Amin 1977), as an alternative to dominant (neo-colonial) political ideologies and development paradigms. Both ‘first world’ free market capitalism and Soviet communism were seen as incompatible with African values and traditions (Rist 2002:131). Rather, ‘Tanzanian socialism’ would be based on *Ujamaa*, or ‘familyhood’ (Fouère 2014; Rist 2002:129–30; Rodney 1972), and an already-existing ‘attitude of mind’ and way of life (Green 2010:23). Although the *Ujamaa* self-help model was gradually abandoned as the Tanzanian state became increasingly authoritarian, it was influential, inspiring ‘grassroots’ development initiatives in NGOs such as Oxfam (Jennings 2002).

The indeterminacy of the concepts like ‘self-reliance’ allow for a diversity of visions of how better futures should be achieved. In Tanzania, different interpretations of *Ujamaa* and self-reliance were taken up in a variety of ways in an ongoing argument about moral economy and moral polity of national development and citizenship (Fouère 2014:4). More widely, ‘self-reliance’ policies opened up alternative trajectories than the one proffered in the Modernisation paradigm: ‘[w]hereas the dominant strategy proposes a single path of “development”, what is now happening is a diversification of “developments”’ (Rist 2002:137).

### **The road to independence: Nation-making and self-reliance**

‘Dependency’, ‘independence’ and ‘self-reliance’ as political keywords and alternative ‘developments’ would soon make their way to the South Pacific. Dependency, Leftist and anticolonial theories were disseminated at the University of the South Pacific (USP) and the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG), where several Ni-Vanuatu independence leaders studied (Swan 2020:221; Tabani 2000:189). At USP in Suva in 1970s, some scholars and students were forging an explicitly anticolonial regional identity in the ‘Pacific Way’ (Tomlinson 2019:26). A cluster of UPNG faculty had anticolonial leanings, some with connections to Tanzania (Chappell 2005:309; Denoon 2012:76; Premdas 1987:144). Students there were also influenced by radical African thought, Negritude, and Black Power (Swan 2017).

Christian activists were also instrumental in forging international links, and influence. Appolinarius Macha, a development officer in the Tanzanian administration was an advisor at 1973 South Pacific Action for Development and Economic Strategies (SPADES) Pan-Pacific conference in Port Vila, alongside three Pacific-based Christian radicals influenced by liberation theology (Gardner 2013:137; Lini 1980:25). The World Council of Churches (WCC) had a strong role, inviting prominent Presbyterian political activists to ‘Ujamaa Safari’ as a cover for them attending the sixth Pan African Congress (6PAC) hosted by

Nyerere in Dar es Salaam (Swan 2020:221). Sethy Regenvanu (2004:92), who would become the first Minister of Lands, recalls the influence of liberation theology and Nyerere's self-reliance on his thought, which he disseminated locally through his work as WCC coordinator.

Pan-Africanism directly and indirectly influenced the decolonisation process, and goals of 'self-reliance' in Melanesia. In 1974, New Hebrides National Party (NHNP)<sup>4</sup> representatives Barak Sope, his wife Mildred, and John Bani were invited to 6PAC (Mar 2016:198), in which the basic principle promoted was 'self-reliance' (Horne 1974:4). Barak Sope delivered a speech entitled 'The Struggle Against Anglo-French Colonialism in the New Hebrides', criticizing French nuclear testing, and spoke of 4.5 million exploited people across the Pacific (Swan 2020:218). That year, a French colonial administrator described the relationship between then-New Hebrides and Tanzania as a '*liaison dangereuse*' (Swan 2020:221).

Following 6PAC, Tanzania and Jamaica invited NHNP to discuss decolonisation at the 'Committee of 24' at UN in 1974 (compare Hoëm this volume), where leader Lini (1980:26) declared that the New Hebrides wanted independence by 1977:

It is imperative that New Hebrideans should decide what their future would be, but not for Britain and France to dictate to them how they should run their country.... We do not want to be spoon-fed, but rather to be given the opportunity to show the world that we also can do something. (Lini 1980:36–7)

After 6PAC, NHNP leaders courted an African American lawyer (of Surinamese descent) Robert van Lierop, recommended through 6PAC contacts, to represent them at UN.<sup>5</sup> Van Lierop was also an activist and filmmaker who had been active in struggles in Mozambique: he would later show his Mozambiquan liberation film in remote areas of Vanuatu (in Minter 2004). NHNP's self-reliance policy was especially influenced by Nyerere's African Socialism, based on decentralisation and (from 1983) a foreign policy embedded in the non-aligned movement, rejecting both colonial capitalism and Soviet dominance (Premdas 1987:155; Chappell 2005:309).

NHNP (renamed Vanua'aku) sought to develop the rural agricultural economy and reduce dependence on imports: small-scale producers were recognised as the economy's 'backbone' (Lini 1980:30). The initiator of 6PAC, Bermuda-born Pauulu Kamarakafego (Roosevelt Browne) moved to then-New Hebrides in 1975, at the invitation of NHNP delegates, to assist in political education and grassroots development. He was deported by French and British colonial administrators for promoting 'Black Power doctrines', and undermining reliance on imported commodities by showing people how to construct houses and water tanks, and manufacture soap (Swan 2020:1).

NHNP maintained an emphasis on villagers' own participation, and a bottom-up approach to development. After his UN speech, Lini and other NHNP leaders visited Tanzania and modelled TANU's grassroots village organisation. In 1978, Lini and other leaders had set up a National Community Development Trust with development partners, 'to develop the islands in a self-reliant and technologically appropriate manner through grassroots collaboration and cooperation'. Village training seminars and a spin-off radio show addressed topics like 'development is not money alone' and 'self-reliance and the use of local resources' (Traub 1983).

Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands also featured 'self-reliance' as a goal in early postcolonial economic plans. The 1972 Faber Report that informed Papua New Guinea's first Prime Minister Michael Somare's 'Eight Aims' included 'self-reliance' and rural development goals (Amarshi et al. 1979:210). The report's authors –including anthropologist Keith Hart – drew on experiences of decolonisation in Africa, criticising modernisation

narratives and emphasising small-scale communities and the informal economy. Hart (2002) recalls: 'I early on formed the opinion that what was needed was a Nyerere-style rural socialist government aiming at self-sufficiency and thereby meeting the needs for both national autonomy and lower rates of Australian subsidy'.

Tanzanian influences were circulating in Papua New Guinean political circles in early 1970s (Denoon 2012:129; Bashkow 2020:206), but policy eventually took a less radical course. Although there 'really was Tanzanian influence in Papua New Guinea's economic strategy ... it had nothing to do with ujamaa' (Denoon 2012:130). Somare's aims would be increasingly discarded as relations were built up with multinational developers, especially in the mining industry (Amarshi et al. 1979:205, 215; Lea 2000:109).

Another major influence on Lini's 'Melanesian Socialism' and aspirations towards 'self-reliance' came via Papua New Guinean Christian scholars Bernard Narokobi and Fr. John Momis (Premdas 1987:144). Vanuatu's committee for the constitution hired Narokobi, then writing his opus *The Melanesian Way*, as advisor (Gardner 2013:142). Drawing on ideas from 'African Socialism' and China,<sup>6</sup> Narokobi (1980:47, 55–9) said Melanesian governments should seek to move away from dependence on foreign aid and 'handouts'. According to the 'Melanesian Way' (1980:19), true national sovereignty and self-reliance begins with the eradication of colonial mindsets: personal sovereignty and self-respect is to be found in ancient Melanesian relational values and practices.

When Vanuatu achieved Independence in 1980, the Vanua'aku party slogan was 'Economic Self-reliance, Financial Independence and Rural Development'. Vanuatu's first President, Sokomanu (1980), declared, 'Our people have fallen into a trap of spoon feeding and begging. It is a disease and our aim is to make people realize that this is not development'. But even by the time of Prime Minister Lini's (1980:62) Independence Address to the Nation in July 1980, he admitted achieving full economic self-reliance was perhaps unrealistic, at least in the short-term: 'Both financially and economically we can expect to be less independent than many states: we shall, for several years to come, depend on external aid ...'. For Lini (1980:62), 'independence' meant the exercise of self-determination, guided by customary and Christian<sup>7</sup> values: 'We are entitled to hope that we should be able to exercise freedom of choice – in other words, independence – in the ways in which we provide public services and change our societies as we develop'. He appealed to a 'spirit of unity' and participation of all: 'Our new republic will need the energy and ability of each of its citizens in the task of nation-building and national development'.

Unity is widely valued as key to development in Melanesia, where failure to develop is often blamed on disputes and individualism (Barker 1996). The Vanua'aku party broke down in 1991, ousting Lini from the leadership. This was the beginning of decades of party schisms, and volatile coalitions in government. To this day, Ni-Vanuatu politicians and public alike often trace present problems and failure to achieve 'self-reliance' in disunity, particularly the political instability that stemmed from the 1991 split (e.g. Bjornum 2016; Hakwa 2020; Ligo 2020a, 2020b).

## SELF-RELIANT DEVELOPMENT IN VANUATU

### Comprehensive reforms: Structural adjustment and self-reliance

The 1990s was a troubled decade for Vanuatu and its surrounding region. Dreams of economic self-reliance – promised by 1990 – seemed increasingly shattered. Exports were low, prices for copra – the mainstay of the rural economy – dropped by early 1990s (Keesing 1993:32), and there was a trade deficit, with imports consistently exceeding



exports. Neoliberal reformers took the cracks as evidence for the need for 'structural adjustment'. In 1997, a 'Comprehensive Reform Program' (CRP) was imposed that did nothing to improve the productive sector, while worsening the debt situation (Gay 2004).

In the same period, the critical 'Dependency' theories faded, even as resources were stripped and debts soared (Keesing 1993:29). A revival of Modernisation Theory can be observed in structural adjustment reforms that characterised 'subsistence' and customary land ownership as impediments to economic development and modernisation. However, land reforms were resisted in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, seen as neo-colonial moves that would only strengthen dependency on foreign ways of life.

Like other structural adjustment programmes, CRP came with an emphasis on 'good governance' in development parlance, an exported version of the neoliberal emphasis on technocratic 'governance' as solution, rather than politics as debate. This was accompanied by an emphasis in the 1990s-2000s on civil society and boosting of private sector involvement (Huffer and Molisa 1999; Rousseau and Taylor 2012:178; cf. Brown 2016). And, in Vanuatu, the shift in development rhetoric towards 'good governance' and 'civil society' corresponded with promotion of a reformation of the subject into a virtuous active citizen, as Rousseau and Taylor (2012:178–9) argued.

These ideas have been taken up in different ways in the region. The Melanesian 'Personal Viability' (PV) course advocated that participants must reform their selves and their character (Bainton 2011). Introduced in Papua New Guinea by a local businessman, the PV course was attended by at least 30,000 people across Papua New Guinea and in Solomon Islands, Fiji, and Vanuatu (Teare 2013:99). Advocating a 'grassroots' alternative to dependence on foreign aid ('handouts'), it was described as a 'scheme for self-reliance and financial independence'. Although the programme co-opted language of Dependency theory (such as 'core' and 'periphery'), participants were taught not to see themselves as victims of neo-colonial exploitation. Rather, economic development required individual responsibility and self-ownership, *i.e.* their transformation into entrepreneurial 'possessive individuals' (Bainton 2011).

The emphasis on governance and civil society remains a powerful development paradigm, epitomised in USAID's 'Journey to Self-Reliance' program introduced in 2018. In 2018, a USAID representative declared their ultimate aim was to end countries' need for foreign assistance. They saw self-reliance as an 'innate desire most fully realised in USA, 'because self-reliance and those notions are cooked into our DNA as Americans' (USAID 2018). More recently (and particularly in the context of climate change and disaster), neoliberal development discourse has also increasingly deployed 'buzzwords' such as 'risk', 'vulnerability' and 'resilience' (see McDonnell 2020). However, 'self-reliance' remains an important term deployed by grassroots to express their alternative visions of development.

### ***Kastom*, land, and self-reliance**

Alternative approaches to development in Vanuatu have drawn on very different conception of self-reliance, more aligned with Lini's Melanesian socialism and valorisation of *kastom*, than the 'possessive individual'. A neoliberal version of 'self-reliance' with continuities of modernization theory has been enacted in Vanuatu by policymakers and development discourse. But it has been countered by a vision of self-reliance compatible with *kastom*, echoing the decolonization process.

In 2005, a 'National Summit for Self-Reliance and Sustainability' in Port Vila led to the formation of a 'National Self-Reliance Strategy'. Twenty-five years after (political) Independence, much focussed on reinvigorating Lini's aim to achieve 'economic independence'.

The strategy promoted the Traditional Economy as the basis for achieving National Self-Reliance', including customary land, local food and traditional forms of wealth. The following year, a 'Kastom Economy' (*Kastom Ekonomi*) initiative was launched (Geismar 2013; Regenvanu 2010; Rousseau and Taylor 2012).

Lini's government's 'self-reliance' — formulated in anti-colonial movements and in opposition to dominant development paradigms — has continuity in the '*Kastom Ekonomi*' initiative. Ralph Regenvanu, the politician most associated with popularizing '*kastom ekonomi*' took advantage of the ambiguity of the term 'economic self-reliance', seeing its cross-over appeal for policymakers and funders (Regenvanu 2005, cited in Rousseau and Taylor 2012:181). He described the project as a 'Trojan horse' for *kastom*, harnessing the familiar language of development and 'self-reliance' (Geismar 2013:176).

However, there is a strong contrast between the 'self-reliance' of the neoliberal project, and that of the national 'self-reliance' propounded by Lini, and later Regenvanu in the *kastom ekonomi* project. As Taylor and Rousseau (2012:179–81) suggest, both the 'rights-bearing subjects' of many 1990s–2000s aid programs, and the 'kastom-bearing subject' of these *kastom ekonomi* projects, could be seen as aiming for subject reformation through promoting certain kinds of knowledge. But while the neoliberal self-reliant subject appears as a self-possessing individual, the ideal subject of 'national self-reliance' is the nation, personified in the 'grassroots' subject of the rural majority.

Up to 80% of Vanuatu's population still live in rural or semi-rural areas, with access to garden land. The Cultural Centre has been actively promoting customary land tenure and modes of food production as fundamental to the *kastom ekonomi*, the social 'safety net' and food security. Simo (2010:41) of the Lands Desk wrote that Melanesians are:

aware that it is traditional land tenure that enables them to be self-reliant, because traditional land is always available if and when a ni-Vanuatu cannot find a cash-paying job in town ... The land guarantees more than 80 percent of the population freedom from hunger, homelessness and unemployment.

Customary land was the key to Ni-Vanuatu remaining self-sufficient subsistence producers, and 'relatively well-housed, well-fed and productively employed citizens', rather than 'landless, homeless and underemployed wage labourers' (2010:43–4). Of course, not everyone has easy access to customary land, especially those in urban areas who may depend on wage labour or the informal economy to get by (see Martin this volume). And many people in many rural areas are either becoming short of land or trying to find the money to pay school fees and meet their aspirations. For many, the opportunity to engage in overseas seasonal labour in New Zealand and Australia is an attractive prospect.

## MIGRATION, DEPENDENCY AND DEVELOPMENT

### Labour migration: Dependency or development?

If modernisation and dependency theories live on, perhaps it is most prominently in migration and development literature, in concepts such as 'brain drain'. The recent promotion of managed temporary foreign worker programmes as 'pro-poor' initiatives conducive to furthering economic development in sending regions can be contextualised as part of a 'migration-development mantra', representing a revival of 1960s modernization narratives (Faist 2009). Debates around temporary foreign worker (or 'guest worker') programs have followed broader shifts in development theory: in the 1950s–60s they were hailed as

furthering economic development in the third world, but by the 1970s Leftist and World Systems theorists suggested they fostered dependency and exacerbated 'underdevelopment' (Castles 1986, 2006).

One of the development paradigms that Hau'ofa (1994:150) challenged was the MIRAB model, an acronym for migration, remittances, and bureaucracy on which many of the small island nations were deemed dependent in development discourse (Poirine 1998). Although (unlike countries such as Tonga and Samoa with significant diasporas), Melane-sians had few opportunities for overseas labour migration in the postcolonial period, the region was often portrayed as fragmented and reliant on aid (Bertram 2006; Martin this volume).

It was only in 2008, with the official launch of New Zealand's 'Recognized Seasonal Employer' (RSE) Pacific seasonal worker programme, that Ni-Vanuatu were able to travel overseas for wage labour in large numbers for the first time since 1970s. In 2011–2013, I conducted fieldwork among the communities of Lamén Island and Lamén Bay, Epi, which had a high degree of engagement in New Zealand's program. The program allows islanders from several Pacific countries to engage as seasonal workers in New Zealand's horticulture and viticulture industries. (A similar Australian scheme launched during my fieldwork in 2012). In general, people welcomed the opportunity to work overseas, because they could earn far more money there than at home.

Temporary migration programs like RSE have been criticised for forcing workers to depend on one employer and denying many of the rights and freedoms owed to citizens. Elsewhere, I have written of how employers become increasingly dependent on seasonal workers as workers depend on them, and how such employment relations are characterised by ambivalence; both sought out, and often experienced as exploitative and alienating (Smith 2015, 2019).

Nonetheless, despite experiences of unfreedom and labour exploitation overseas, seasonal work was welcomed by the community as conducive to 'development'. Returned workers frequently said that the opportunity enabled people who finished school at Class Six (Primary School) to build houses that were previously only accessible to government workers, politicians, or successful business people. Some saw opportunities for overseas labour as an alternative to expecting aid from government and development organisations, or 'hand-outs' from wealthier kin. Mary, the Appleseed recruiter who was in well-paid government employment and highly educated had told me that before the migration scheme she felt self-conscious about having perhaps the biggest house in the community and was almost relieved that now so many families had the opportunity of achieving a 'good house'. Mary implied that this took the pressure off her to support kin members, saying that seasonal migration is changing people's attitudes to development because people no longer just 'sit and wait for hand-outs'. The critique of 'hand-outs' can also serve richer elites in legitimating their accumulative lifestyles and limit expectations of redistribution of wealth to poorer 'have not' relatives, as Gewertz and Errington (1998), and Martin (2007) have shown in Papua New Guinea. However, in this context the majority of the households had a chance to engage in seasonal work, and thus if anything was seen as more akin to narrowing, rather than widening, inequalities within the community.

Overseas seasonal work was also seen as an alternative to the lure of town. Mary told me she encouraged young people not to travel to town, but to 'stay and develop your place'. While government jobs are held in high esteem, the problem of youth heading to urban areas without the promise of well-paid work is seen as a problem by government<sup>8</sup> and grass-roots alike because it is associated with anti-social behaviours and dependence on others for food and money.

On the other hand, Epi people often complained that returned workers were greedier and more individualistic, shirking obligations to others. People were critical of those that abandoned their gardens and instead spent their money on food and wasteful expenditure. Community leaders commented that many seasonal workers seem increasingly reliant on a cycle of migration, and when the money runs out, they will return the next year. Particular criticism was reserved for returned migrants who spent all their savings and sought money from others to buy necessities or cover their costs to return overseas. Leaders often complained that seasonal workers were not contributing enough time or money to community projects. And when the community council demanded compulsory donations as a kind of compensation for absenteeism from community work, many seasonal workers refused. As such, community members often pointed to ways seasonal migration was perceived to be contributing to a breakdown in everyday forms of reciprocal interdependencies seen as critical to *kastom* and community relations.

Nevertheless, people generally agreed that returned workers had ‘developed their place’ in significant ways, typically pointing out the proliferation of solar lighting and permanent buildings. Workers often made generous voluntary donations to community projects. Fundraisings were more successful than ever before and church leaders reported much higher income from tithes and gifts.

In 2012, the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu called for a nation-wide appeal called ‘*Yumi Kivim*’ (‘We Give’) where they requested that every church member across Vanuatu give 1000 vatu (around US\$10). A Presbyterian Elder compared this project with the government’s Five-Year Plan for ‘self-reliance’ following Independence in 1980. He hoped that the achievement of economic self-reliance would ‘open a road’ and ‘set a direction’ for the Republic too. On the day of *Yumi Kivim* celebrations, the elders and deacons displayed a large banner stating ‘*Rod blong Kasem Economic Self-Reliance*’ (‘The road, or way, for achieving economic self-reliance’). The amount raised at the *Yumi Kivim* fundraising exceeded all expectations and initially reinforced their pride in the Lamien Bay congregation as a ‘model’ for other churches in terms of tithing and economic self-reliance.

However, there was some anger when it transpired that the church and the district were receiving less funds from the Presbyterian Church than the sum they had raised, because the funds were being redistributed to other areas of church administration. Several people complained that this was not fair: the funds should be retained by the local church and district. Community resources should be pooled for use at community level and not be allowed to dissipate ‘outside’.

In this case, the desired ‘self-reliance’ was neither the ‘national’ self-reliance espoused by government (and in this case, the church) nor individual families or ‘possessive individuals’, but at community level. Dalsgaard (2013) described a similar situation in a Manus community reliant on remittances from urban migrants, where ‘self-reliance’ often pertained to the community of migrants and rural kin combined. It may seem counter-intuitive to those of us imbued in dependency discourse, but in these contexts, the question of ‘self-reliance’ is not precluded by the exogenous source of the income (overseas wages, or urban remittances<sup>9</sup>), or subordination in wage labour (although I discuss critiques below). It is more about the collective capacity to create bottom-up development.

### **‘The government is us here’: Developing the community**

When Epi people point to examples of ‘self-reliant’ development they very often pointed to action and contributions at the local island and community level. In late 2018, a group of returned Epi workers hit the headlines when they donated a portion of their earnings in order to build a doctor’s house at the island’s hospital. The workers handed over the key to

the government and entreated them to send a doctor to the island, which had been without a qualified doctor for decades (Roberts 2018). The story was widely shared on social media, and attracted much praise and admiration, with many people seeing it as a prime example of self-reliance, and good citizenship, as seen in the Facebook comments posted when the newspaper article was shared on a local forum (Harry 2018):

"Ask what you can do for your country, oli soem self-reliance [they demonstrate self-reliance], how citizens of an independent country should act..."

"Ol man Epi i soem tru Independence" [Epi people demonstrate true Independence]

"Emia nao self-reliance. Goveman emi yumi ia nao. Mi wish se gudfala faisin Evri community lo Vanuatu oli adoptm." [This here is self-reliance. The government is us here. I wish this good conduct was adopted by every community in Vanuatu...]

"Wow amazing! Wake up call for the Government ... olketa lo aelan e struggle [those on the islands struggle], to go as far as building a doctor's house and handing it over to the Government. Wow. Well done, ol [all] true citizen."

"Ol family blong yumi lo noumea we oli vote against independence oli sud luk hemia. Yumi sacrifice yumi free" [Our family in Noumea that voted against Independence should see this. We sacrifice, we are free.]

Such projects are heralded as a kind of 'do-it-yourself' development, where government have failed to deliver hoped-for infrastructure and facilities. When I asked the Lamén Bay man leading the doctor's house project about it, he told me:

If we put it in the hands of government, they can't do it because they have so many services to provide. So, I think if there's a way we can help, we must do it. If we want to "bring up" our hospital on Epi, the Epi people must stand up first, and start it. If others see it, they'll think, "They mean business by doing it", and they can help us.

This attitude of 'help yourself first' at the community (rather than the individual) level, is commonly hailed as epitomizing self-reliance. It is much more unambiguously positive than expectations of distributions from aid or allowances *via* Members of Parliament. In some contexts, people complain local MPs have failed to deliver on their obligations, based on community and kinship connections, and political participation. In other contexts, such 'handouts' exemplify partisan politics, nepotism, and corruption, representing both an undesirable form of community dependency and a common reason for the state's failure to deliver real development. The project leader's suggestion that, 'if there's a way we can help, we must do it', and the Facebook responses referring to good 'citizenship' point to alternative ideals of political subjectivity and participation, and the relationship of society and the state: visions based more on collective responsibility and mutual obligation than rights-bearing 'possessive individuals'.

## AGRICULTURE AND SELF-RELIANCE

### **Back to our roots: Land, kava, and self-reliance**

While the question of labour migration evokes much ambivalence as to whether it boosts dependency or self-reliance, domestic production, especially through agriculture, is

generally agreed as conducive to achieving economic self-reliance. In a 2018 speech the Prime Minister said that the:

[P]roductive Sector is a key priority of the Government today, and the government supports primary sector development including agriculture because it is the key for development to achieve economic self-reliance, that our forefathers had preached during the Independence Struggle. (Garae 2018)

While the '*kastom ekonomi*' program emphasised the fact that most rural communities continue to live to a large degree from subsistence farming on customary land (as well as rearing animals, hunting and fishing activities), the government and development practitioners alike have expressed the desire to increase exports. However, economists have discussed the near-impossibility of competing in export markets due to geographical remoteness, small scale and other limitations.

Historically, rural populations in Vanuatu have tended to selectively engage in productive activities for the market. Rodman (1987:720) has discussed how villagers tended to produce cash crops and go fishing intermittently following a 'targeting pattern', withdrawing when conditions were unfavourable. In the 1980s, when Vanuatu's new state government sought to promote commercial fishing in order to boost the country's productive base and further the program of national 'economic self-reliance', for Santo villagers, self-reliance had a different meaning: 'keeping one's options open' (Rodman 1987:713). Rodman further argued:

Behaviour that to the rural islander seems to ensure a household's self-reliance, may appear sporadic and unpredictable to the urban-based planner whose goal of self-reliance can only be achieved by finding a way to make the villagers increase their productivity (1987:720).

Thus, even in the period following Independence, 'self-reliance' had contested meanings and there was a disjuncture between policymakers and rural communities.

Nevertheless, post-Independence emphasis on agricultural development in achieving self-reliance is commonly echoed across rural areas. On the island of Santo, an organisation called 'Zero Vatu Self Reliance Local Development Association' aims to build entrepreneurs with 'zero vatu' (*i.e.*, no money). Their stated vision is to 'Make agriculture the golden work in Vanuatu'. They suggest that agriculture should be the 'backbone' of Vanuatu's economy, but the government has failed to invest in rural areas. However, the organisation is critical of the government and of major commercial enterprise for exploiting hardworking farmers and labourers (Willie G. 2019; Willie R. 2019).

For many Ni-Vanuatu today, cultivating kava has become the great new hope for achieving 'economic self-reliance'. As of June 2019, kava became Vanuatu's main export commodity contributing 60% of commodity exports and valued at 227 million vatu (Willie G. 2019; Willie R. 2019). Vanuatu is currently the world's biggest supplier on the international market. In this case, 'self-reliance' does not entail freedom from dependence on markets and entrepreneurialism but recalls the hopes for agricultural expansion and increasing exports promoted in the decolonization era. However, the fact that the export market in kava is dominated by expatriates is causing consternation among some Ni-Vanuatu, who think the full kava industry should be restricted to indigenous people, as kava bars already are. Nonetheless, for rural farmers, kava's status as a domestic crop, well-suited to remote areas because it requires minimal capital, uses traditional knowledge and minimal tools, lends it to ideas of 'self-reliance'. The strong urban demand and its use for ritual and

recreation in rural areas perhaps makes it more possible to 'keep one's options open' with kava, compared to volatile markets for other export crops.

### **'Money is in the ground': Alternatives to wage labour**

The burgeoning export market has contributed to escalating kava prices, and many farmers are increasingly planting kava. Growing kava is seen by many as more conducive to economic self-reliance than seasonal migration. It allows people to remain on their own land, the ultimate symbol of independence, as opposed to wage-labour, which is more debated as to whether it is conducive to independence, or merely a form of dependence, even exploitation. I heard many stories of people abandoning wage work and seasonal labour to farm kava when they realised that they could make as much or more through kava cultivation.

People would often say in regards to kava 'The RSE is here already', suggesting that kava cultivation is preferable to working overseas. When I visited Santo, I wanted to head to the area of Vanafo, which I heard was one of the main kava producing areas. I managed to persuade a driver from Stone Hill, close to Vanafo, who told me he acquired his enormous truck with kava money. On the drive towards Stone Hill, I mentioned my research on the seasonal worker programme. He said many young men from that area had migrated too, but now many of them stayed behind to plant kava instead. He related a version of an oft-repeated allegory that an old man had told the youth in his community:

An old man said, 'I want to tell you a story of mine'. (Because he saw all the young people going away like that and he felt bad, eh?). He asked, 'Why do you go away? Here we have money. We have everything.' He said 'I want to tell you a story. There once was a young man sitting around, and he thought, "I want to eat turtle. I want to taste turtle. Today I must kill and eat a turtle". He took his spear, and he jumped from stone to stone until he jumped onto the back of a big stone. But he didn't realise it was a turtle. He stood on the back of this turtle, he lifted up his spear and said "If a turtle comes by now, I'll be ready to spear it". He waited and he waited, standing there until he started feeling bad. He jumped down and went back home'. The old man said to the young people, 'Why are you going over there? You keep looking to the outside. Do you think the New Zealand people will give you something? Money is in the ground'.

'There is money in the ground' is also a common refrain in kava-growing areas. The driver told me a Port Vila man came to Stonehill looking to purchase 3000 heads of kava, because he wanted to start a nakamal (kava bar). The Vila man found the driver's son-in-law, simply asking him, 'What do you want? A house?'. The driver's son-in-law requested a truck, and one was shipped to him. The driver said, 'many go to New Zealand but you don't see them with things like [trucks]. Now, many just plant kava.'

Kava's status as an 'indigenous'<sup>10</sup> crop, bound up with *kastom* and local and national identities has made it a potent symbol for hopes for national 'self-reliance'. On Independence Day 2019, 'KavaWorld' (2019) a kava promoting website hosted in Vanuatu, reinforced the association between kava exports and self-reliance:

After the political independence gained in 1980, it is now time to try and achieve a bit more of economical independence, and stop depending on foreign aid ...

With kava, for example in Pentecost, Kava is paying for all the school fees, Kava is paying for solar panels, paying for water tank, there is light everywhere because of kava! Not because of a project, not because of the government! Never any foreign aid project had any such impact on our development! This is the real crop of independence and of self-reliance!

## CONCLUSION

The ambiguity of the terms 'dependence' and 'self-reliance' and their capacity to express different meanings toward different social and political ends lend themselves to articulating a range of different political, economic and social ascriptions, at different scales. Williams (1976:24) saw keywords' ambiguity as lending them to political and social debate, and thus having the potential to actively shape and reshape political and social life. Just as 'dependence' and 'self-reliance' can be seen as 'keywords' in the Western context, particularly in debates over welfare (Fraser and Gordon 1994a, 1994b), so too have the terms have been applied and taken up in different ways in the context of postcolonial contexts deemed 'peripheral', not least the Pacific.

'Self-reliance' as a keyword has been deployed by different interest groups in putting forward alternative visions of 'development' in Vanuatu and means of attaining it (Geismar 2013:34; Rodman 1987:713; Rousseau and Taylor 2012; compare Dalsgaard 2013 on Manus). For some, self-reliance echoes its use by neoliberal ideologues decrying dependence on foreign aid, and advocates of economic reforms that see tradition and customary land arrangements as a barrier to development. A counter-politics influenced by Thirdworldism, Black Internationalism, and Dependency theories has recentred development aspirations on national self-reliance, in which the rural economy and *kastom* are important foundations.

Beyond the international and national scales, the term 'self-reliance' has also been taken up by Ni-Vanuatu 'grassroots' in expressing their own conceptions and desires. While accusations of dependency have often been levelled at a 'handout' mentality of the 'grassroots', when I have heard the term 'self-reliance' deployed, it has more often been to express a hoped-for unity and collective participation. This is seen in expressing and shaping alternative forms of development at a more communal or societal level.

On the other hand, failures to 'develop' are often seen as a moral failure, particularly blamed on disputes and disunity. This was true in the Lamén communities, where opportunities to make money such as visits by an international cruise ship had been stopped due to land disputes and accusations of theft between different land-owning groups in Lamén Bay. But the failure at national level too, was often blamed on political disunity, which is frequently traced back to the breakdown of Lini's Vanua'aku party in 1991. On Lamén island, an older man (and another church Elder) who knew Lini from his university days in Solomon Islands told me that Lini abandoned his resolution to achieve 'economic independence' when he 'passed behind' and selfishly accepted money to join a new 'National United Party', adding, 'He thought about himself... He broke his party and dropped his original idea'. A while later, the Lamén man met Lini's uncle in Vila. Lini's uncle said every time he drank kava he would spit and think about the 1991 resolution to go toward economic independence. The Lamén man replied, 'Forget the resolution. Forget it, because Lini is a selfish man.'

The common frustration with the failure of hoped-for development to materialise evokes aspects of Sahlins' (2005) claim that indigenous people's desire for outside goods, and eventually 'modernization' requires them to undergo a kind of 'humiliation' (see Stasch



this volume). Rather than seeing 'tradition' as a barrier to positive progress like Rostow, Sahlins expresses sorrow at the erosion of indigenous ways of life. But despite his pessimism, he (2005:39) admits this 'humiliation' in pursuit of progress is 'double edged' and often goes hand-in-hand with a self-conscious objectification of indigenous culture that may offer a source of pride.

While many rural Ni-Vanuatu 'grassroots' seek material development, they often evoke pride in *kastom* as a source not only of social and political identity, but also prosperity. The Chief of neighbouring Wenia village, who was also the representative for Epi at Malvatumauri (the National Council of Chiefs), was a major proponent of *kastom*, and his words epitomised the version of 'self-reliance' evoked in the *kastom ekonomi*:

We are fully 'developed' here already. We live like kings already. You just get up, and go to the garden... In the afternoon, you come back and you eat. You take some kava, drink and sleep. When the sun rises, you can get to work. But in places you say are 'developed', where 'the economy grows fast' there are many troubled people. Some sleep on the road, no food and no bed to sleep in. They don't have work and they worry... 'Development' should mean you make sure you can live... The 'development of *kastom*' has enabled us to live for a long time.

Reflecting on debates around dependence and development, Hau'ofa recalled his time at USP, and his disappointment that many of the creative discussions at the university about liberation descended into interpersonal antagonisms including between proponents of the 'Pacific Way', and more strongly Marxist and Third Worldist perspectives: 'It was a pity because underneath the bickering were real alternative visions of our region' (in Clifford 2009:243). Despite scepticism about the credentials of Lini's Melanesian Socialism (Howard 1983; Premdas 1987; Tabani 2000), dreams of economic 'self-reliance' continue to inspire efforts to realise 'alternative visions' of development, that are rooted in regional identities and *kastom*, and propagated through wider transnational solidarity.

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## NOTES

1. Tourism is perhaps a bigger contributor to GDP and local employment. I focus here on migration and agriculture because they have been my research focus, because of space, and because I have more often heard 'self-reliance' evoked in these contexts. Recent controversies over 'passport sales', another major contributor to GDP raises interesting questions of independence and citizenship, but ones I cannot adequately address in the space of this article.
2. See Lindstrom (2008) for a discussion of the history of the term '*kastom*' in Vanuatu, and its connection to 'Melanesian Socialism'.

3. 'Economic sovereignty' as a form of state autarky has been revived as something of a keyword in political economy today, particularly in the African context. While it has some affinity with 'self-reliance' there are differences, and the phrase rarely comes up in the Vanuatu context, so I do not discuss it in this article.
4. The NHNP was one of two major parties formed in Vanuatu in the lead up to Independence and was predominantly Anglophone. It defeated the Francophone UMP (Union of Moderate Parties) and formed the first government (see Tabani 2000 for more on the Francophone perspective and the Nagriamel secession movement).
5. Van Lierop would later act as representative to the new nation from 1981 until 1994, helping to forge the 'Alliance of Small Island States'.
6. For more on Narokobi's African and transnational influences and relations see Bashkow (2020).
7. Of course, this represents a particular representation of Christian values: one compatible with anticolonial goals. Anthropologists have debated to what extent varieties of Christianity may have imported more individualistic ideas in the region (see Morgain and Taylor 2015:5).
8. The government also encouraged agricultural projects to curb urban migration, often explicitly referring to ideals of self-reliance and community development (e.g. Anon 2020).
9. While urban residents commonly send money to rural kin, those in rural areas frequently send packages to town dwellers, often saying with pity how expensive life is there.
10. Kava is thought to have been first domesticated in Vanuatu (Lebot 1995).

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